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RUEAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4261  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0475  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4878  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0730  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0301  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0757  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4458  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2749  
RUEHK/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0769  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1408  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1989  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1394  
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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: OPPOSITION LEADER FORCIBLY DEPORTED TO KYRGYZSTAN

REF: TASHKENT 792

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) On August 12, Birlik opposition party General Secretary Vasila Inoyatova (who is also head of the Ezgulik human rights group) reported to poloff that Birlik Deputy Chairman Pulat Akhunov, who returned to Uzbekistan from exile in Sweden in March 2007 to renew his passport (reftel), was forcibly deported from Uzbekistan. According to Inoyatova, Uzbek authorities burst into Akhunov's home near Andijon on August 10, threw a large sack over his head, and forced him into a nearby car, which then drove him illegally (without going through immigration or customs) across the border into Kyrgyzstan. The car reportedly drove Akhunov all the way to the outskirts of Bishkek, where he was dumped off without any identification or money. Inoyatova said that Akhunov literally only had the clothes on his back and had to walk the remainder of the way into Bishkek.

¶2. (C) Akhunov returned to Uzbekistan from exile in Sweden in March 2007 to renew his Uzbek passport, which had expired after he turned 45 years' of age (Note: All Uzbek citizens must renew their passports at 25 and 45 years' of age. End note.) After submitting his passport for renewal to the local Ministry of Interior Passport Office (OVIR) in Andijon province in April 2007, OVIR officials refused to grant Akhunov a new Uzbek passport or return his old one. Authorities interfered with his travel within Uzbekistan on several occasions in 2007 and 2008, including preventing him from attending the Embassy's July 4 reception this year. On July 7, Akhunov was summoned to a court in Andijon province on July 9 to review his "residency status." According to Inoyatova, the court ruled on July 28 that Akhunov was to be deported from Uzbekistan because he lacked a propiska (residency permit). As Inoyatova noted, Akhunov lacked a propiska because OVIR refused to issue him a new passport.

¶3. (C) Inoyatova said that Akhunov had already approached the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office

in Bishkek, which is currently assisting him. Birlik party leader Abdurakhmon Pulat, who resides in Washington, also reportedly wired money to Akhunov via Western Union. Inoyatova believed that Akhunov would return to Sweden after he is granted new documentation by UNHCR. Since Akhunov was unofficially transported by Uzbek authorities across the border into Kyrgyzstan, Inoyatova speculated that he would be charged with illegal border crossing if he ever attempted to return to Uzbekistan.

¶4. (C) Comment: Akhunov's deportation is no surprise: he himself predicted as much during poloff's visit to his home on June 26 (refftel). At the time, Akhunov seemed relieved that at least the Uzbeks were moving towards making a decision regarding his residency status and that even if he were deported from Uzbekistan, at least he would be reunited with his family in Sweden. Nevertheless, the method by which the Uzbeks reportedly deported Akhunov is disturbing and appears aimed at sending a blunt message to other opposition figures.

BUTCHER